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UNCLAS PRETORIA 000258

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/EPS AND AF/S/TCRAIG AND KGAITHER

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: CASC FAIR ECON ETRD SF

SUBJECT: U.S. REGISTERED AIRCRAFT CRASHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

(U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet distribution.

¶1. (U) A U.S.-registered twin prop Aerostar (N7478S) crashed January 18 near Cornelia, South Africa in the northern Free State Province. The aircraft, owned and operated by South African national Dirk de Vos, left Wonderboom Airport in Pretoria at 4:30 pm destined for Harrismith. Cornelia Police Inspector Jacques de Vos confirmed that the craft was piloted by Dirk de Vos and carried four passengers: Gerhard Bekker, Edwin Mahabeer, Jaco de Wit, and Jaco Odendaal. All were found dead at the scene.

¶2. (U) Inspector Andre de Kok, with South Africa's Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), told Econoff that the deceased were known South African citizens. Johannesburg Consular officials verified that none of the victims were registered with the Consulate or appeared in the PIERS database.

¶3. (SBU) South African Police Services (SAPS) Inspector Tsotetsi told Econoff that heavy rain hit the Cornelia area

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from 14:00 to 22:00 on January 18, which may have affected flying conditions. However, a reported phone call between a passenger and a family member in Harrismith 20 minutes before the scheduled landing made no mention of bad weather. CAA inspectors on the scene are trying to locate the whereabouts of the aircraft's five logbooks to rule out the possibility of airworthiness issues. CAA officials are liaising with Dennis Jones at the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB).

¶4. (SBU) FAA records show that the aircraft is still registered to Aquila Air Inc. in Endicott, New York. However, an FAA official told Econoff that attempts to contact Aquila at the last known address have been unsuccessful since 1999. CAA officials acquainted with de Vos told Econoff that he acquired the aircraft sometime in the past year.

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